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SUBJECT: YABLOKO TURNS OVER A NEW LEAF

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Classified By: Acting Political Counselor Bob Patterson. Reason: 1.4
(d).

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: The fallout from founding father Grigoriy Yavlinskiy's decision at the 15th Yabloko Party Congress to resign as its head in favor of Sergey Mitrokhin is still being examined. Yavlinskiy hoped that his resignation (while staying engaged as a member of a new 12-person Political Committee) and the party's restructuring would improve its chances to stay relevant during the four-year electoral hiatus. While the party's mainstream seems satisfied with Yavlinskiy's decision and the accompanying structural reforms to the party, representatives of its more radical elements and political pundits are more skeptical. End Summary.

And Then There Were None

[1](#)2. (SBU) The 15th congress of the Russian United Democratic Party "Yabloko" took place in a Moscow suburb June 21-22. The congress brought together 125 voting delegates from throughout Russia. Outsiders were surprised that Yavlinskiy, the party's leader for the past 15 years and one of its three founders (along with current Russian Federation Ombudsman Vladimir Lukin and Yuriy Boldyrev, who has now gone over to the pro-Kremlin Just Russia party) announced his resignation as leader of the party and supported the candidacy of his deputy, Moscow City Duma member Sergey Mitrokhin. Mitrokhin later told reporters that Yavlinskiy had originally suggested that he take over the reins of the party after the December 2007 Duma elections. The congress was not without its drama, although it paled in comparison to the Russia-Netherlands European football quarterfinal with which it was competing for attention. It quashed dissent within the party by minimizing the influence of Maksim Reznik, head of the party's active St. Petersburg branch, although it stopped short of expelling him and others who have co-operated with more-radical opposition groups.

[1](#)3. (SBU) On the evening of June 21, the election of the party's leader began with six announced candidates: Yavlinskiy; Mitrokhin; Reznik; St. Petersburg representative Sergey Ivanenko; Head of the Federal Anti-trust Service Igor Artemyev and Kareliya Yabloko head Vasiliy Popov. According to press reports, Artemyev and Ivanenko dropped out in favor of Mitrokhin, followed in short order by Yavlinskiy, who in announcing his decision, told the members that he had "dreamed" that the party would be able to exist without him. Mitrokhin received the support of 75 delegates, while Maksim Reznik, who had been nominated by Yabloko's independent-minded St. Petersburg branch, received 24 votes and Popov, 20. Six ballots were declared invalid.

[1](#)4. (SBU) In opening the party congress, Yavlinskiy said that it must introduce new people into leadership positions. In addition to electing a new party chairman, the congress

abolished the deputy chairman positions; it will now have secretaries who will cover different aspects of the party's life. To make the party leadership "more horizontal" (an attempt to distinguish it from the "vertical of power" used to describe the current tandemocracy of Medvedev and Putin) the delegates approved the creation of a 12-member Political Committee. This new body will not have a chairman. Its members include Mitrokhin, Yavlinskiy, Popov, Artemyev, former deputy chairs Sergey Ivanenko and Aleksey Arbatov, party Central Committee member Yelena Dubrovina, Yabloko Party staff head Boris Bisnik, Yabloko Green faction head Aleksey Yablokov, St. Petersburg Yabloko representative Mikhail Amosov, human rights activist Sergey Kovalev and party member Viktor Sheynis. According to press reports, the powers of the Political Committee are rather wide and include, among others, termination of the responsibilities of the party chairman and convoking extraordinary party congresses. The Political Committee will also formulate the position of the party on key political issues and distribute financial resources. It is expected to meet at least once every three months.

15. (SBU) Delegates also authorized staffing changes to the 33-member party Bureau. Seventy percent of the Bureau's members are to be new and 12 of them should be under the age of 35. At the 15th Party Congress only 18 members received the required number of votes for election to the Bureau. The third time proved lucky for Reznik, who had previously lost to Mitrokhin in his bid to become head of the party and was also not selected to join the party's Political Committee. Less fortunate was Moscow Yabloko youth leader Ilya Yashin. The St. Petersburg contingent of the party had recently taken a defiantly anti-Kremlin approach (ref A) and participated in the National Assembly organized by Garry Kasparov, Mikhail Kasyanov and the National Bolsheviks. Moscow party representatives have favored a more accommodating path with the Kremlin and both Yavlinskiy and Mitrokhin had previously stated publicly that participation in the National Assembly is incompatible with Yabloko party membership.

Many are Skeptical About the Party's Restructuring

16. (SBU) Yabloko members have found it difficult to determine how effective the new structure will be, especially how "horizontal" and progressive the new Political Committee will be. Yabloko announced plans for a second session in the fall to review these structural changes. Yashin did not think that refitting the party's Bureau with new, younger members would improve Yabloko's situation. "The point is not how young the party's leaders are, but rather how independent," he lamented.

17. (SBU) Political experts and observers have been rather skeptical about Yabloko's possible re-animation. Although most agreed that the change of leadership was welcome, many believed the party is in crisis, that a change in leadership is not enough, and that other steps should be taken to ensure the party's survival. Alexander Kynev, an expert at the International Institute of Humanitarian and Political Studies, said that Yavlinskiy should have left as head of the party eight years ago. Mikhail Vinogradov, General Director of the Center of Contemporary Politics did not believe Yavlinskiy's resignation would improve the process of unifying the democratic forces in Russia. He thought that "the decay of the party is its more likely future," unless the Kremlin chooses Yabloko to become the major democratic party in Russia. "The developments within the party are of secondary importance," he concluded. Political scientist Konstantin Simonov said that Yavlinskiy had to leave, given the party's poor showing in the December 2007 parliamentary elections in which it only received 1.6 percent of the vote. Simonov told the Vedomosti newspaper that "Yabloko has no future, either with Yavlinskiy, or without him."

18. (SBU) Union of Right Forces (SPS) leader Nikita Belykh was more optimistic. He thought that under Mitrokhin, interaction between Yabloko and SPS would improve. Political

scientist Dmitriy Oreshkin agreed with Belykh that with Mitrokhin as head of the party, changes can be expected, particularly along the lines of organizational and personnel work.

Comment

19. (C) Conversations with party members and leadership over the past year have indicated weariness with Yavlinskiy, who had led the party since its inception. Yabloko had struggled to find a strategy equal to the current Kremlin power structure. Yavlinskiy's recent overtures to the Kremlin, including his comment at the Congress that the party is open to a dialogue with the Kremlin, as well as rumors that he would accept a government job if offered, show that the party favors accommodation and compromise with the government. Its choice to work with the Kremlin may, in the end, be no more inspired than the inclination of some to fight it on the streets, and could be yet another phase in the party's continuing march to irrelevance.

RUSSELL